

Section 508 and the impact on NASA's use of images on the web
(notes taken by Charles Redmond, transcribed by same)

A meeting/telecon was held at Goddard Space Flight Center on Monday, June 11, 2001, involving representatives from NASA and other agencies to discuss the impact on the agencies of the Section 508 rules regarding images and alternate tags. The meeting was called because NASA and other agencies produce a large variety of web pages with automatically-generated images, images which basically come from a satellite or other source with no human intervention prior to being posted on the web site.

Participants at the meeting/telecon were:

Tom Weber, NASA IT Accessibility Working Group Chairman, GSFC
Charles Redmond, NASA HQ IT Accessibility manager, HQ
Emma Antunes, Goddard webmaster, GSFC
Teresa Hines, Langley CIO office, LaRC
Mike Gerber, National Weather Service 508 coordinator, NWS
Fred Mosher, National Weather Service, NWS
Michael Hartman, Goddard accessibility manager, GSFC

The group identified several issues associated with both the agency's ongoing web activities and the impact on those activities of Section 508 rules. These issues are:

NASA, NOAA, and NWS (and probably others) all produce images automatically from satellite or other sensor data and automatically post these images to web pages;

These images include such categories as:

- Live radar imaging;
- Live solar observations;
- Live satellite images (GOES, NOAA spacecraft);
- Live television camera images inside NASA control rooms and laboratories;
- Manipulated images where false color is used (scientific visualization);

It was felt that there needed to be a distinction between images which were interpreted and/or analyzed and for which there ought to be an alternate text tag and images which are, by the very nature of the posting, raw data with no interpretation and no analysis. If there were a distinction between raw data images and analyzed images, there might be an opportunity to post a notice on the raw data image front page which identified the images as raw data. Such a page could also have a link to a separate page or set of pages where images of the type on the raw data page were analyzed and the end user could use that link to understand the images in conceptual terms. There would still be no capability to caption or provide ALT tags for the raw data images but at least there would be some explanation as to why there were not ALT tags.

There was also a discussion about using a focus group of individuals who have vision disabilities or who are blind to provide some form of valid feedback to this group. The National Council on Disabilities (a Federally-chartered group) might provide a list of individuals who could constitute such a focus group. There was also a suggestion that the American Meteorological Society or the American Association for the Advancement of Science might have a listing of scientists or weather forecasters who have vision disabilities and we might use representatives from those groups to help constitute a focus group. The purpose of having a focus group would be to provide the NASA Accessibility team with a prioritization of image data to make accessible. The thinking of the NASA/NOAA/NWS group was that certain images may not provide any useful information to

individuals who have vision disabilities even if we were to provide meaningful alternate text information.

The discussion also cited the need for a near-term solution for meeting the June 21 deadline and for longer-term solutions which may need to await the development of appropriate technology or software.

The group agreed to meet again pending the posting of these minutes and the completion of certain identified follow-up actions (cited above). The group also indicated a desire to continue these discussions and to include, if possible, representatives from NIH, USGS and any other heavy imaging agencies.

Next steps included the following actions:

1. Get list of vision disabled scientists;
2. Get list of possible vision disabled focus group members;
3. Propose language for “raw image data” pages;
4. Establish focus group consisting of vision disabled non-NASA members;
5. Continue discussions of relevance of image data with focus group;
6. Continue assessment pending focus group results.